

The importance of metadiscourse in the genre “Promotion of Touristic Services and Products”: differences in English and Spanish

Francisca Suau-Jiménez
Rosana Dolón-Herrero
Filologia Anglesa i Alemanya
Facultat de Filologia
Universitat de València
e-mail: suau@uv.es
e-mail: dolon@uv.es

Abstract

This article aims to highlight the importance of metadiscourse, one aspect of discourse which is crucial in the relation that sender and receiver of a message establish, in the genre *Promotion of Touristic Services and Products*, and also the need to integrate its teaching and learning within higher education course of LSP. This genre is one the most frequent text types dealing with the industry of tourism and the fact that they are well written or translated can provide a positive or negative image of the product or service that these texts promote, therefore having the power to influence their selling success or failure. Differences between Spanish and English metadiscourse in this genre are described, the aim being to raise awareness about the diverse characteristics that these two languages depict and, thus, the necessity to teach metadiscourse as a separate linguistic item, in order to make students command it.

Introduction

The discourse of tourism is a language of speciality which displays across a series of genres, one of which is the *Promotion of Touristic Services or Products*, possibly the most well known and used genre within the field of tourism, usually promoting places, cities, natural regions or whole countries. Its communicative goal is always to persuade potential customers to visit those places and buy touristic services and/or products and it takes the form of printed leaflets, brochures or web pages. It contains a series of recurrent communicative functions working at the service of persuasion, such as explaining, describing, exemplifying, etc. which shape different grammatical structures. Specific vocabulary also plays a very important role since it carries all the semantic and conceptual burden. However, the study of this language of speciality would be incomplete if we did not take into account its metadiscourse.

Metadiscourse has been defined as the linguistic material, spoken or written, which does not add anything from the propositional or content viewpoint, but helps the reader to organize, interpret and evaluate the given information (Vande Kopple, 1985; Crismore et al., 1993). In the same vein, some recent new approaches to discourse analysis have revisited the concept of genre and have introduced that of social construct (Fairclough, 1992, 1995), suggesting that texts are part of social events or the linguistic form in which people act and interact socially. Both authors of texts and their audiences are seen as agents whose actions are not free, but socially delimited or constrained. Therefore, metadiscourse is especially important in certain genres with a performative purpose, as happens with the one we have analyzed in this research, where the reader does not only decode a message but, as a result of it, also acts. Besides, metadiscourse coincides with the function of language that Halliday (1978, 1994) describes as

interpersonal, that is to say, the function which explains how the author addresses the tenor by means of different linguistic elements like personal pronouns, imperatives, certain adjectives or epistemic verbs which contain part of the author's beliefs, opinions or hints that try to influence the reader's interpretation of the text.

If we compare the amount of language that metadiscourse needs to be displayed with the propositional content of a text, it holds a very small percentage of words or structures. However, its importance is considerable in certain genres where the interpersonal relationship with the reader is important, as happens in touristic ones. When metadiscourse in academic and scientific genres (Moreno, 1998; Salager-Meyer, 1994; Hyland, 1998) has been the object of multiple studies and research, we have not found that touristic genres have been analyzed from this viewpoint. And yet, we find that metadiscourse plays an important role in touristic genres, since they have a relevant performative function. Readers are highly influenced by the propositional and metadiscursive elements that touristic texts contain, and, thus, their communicative goal to persuade potential customers is carried out in this way.

Also, from a research carried out recently (Suau, 2006) we have observed that the discourse of this typical genre of tourism has different characteristics in different languages, in this case, English and Spanish. Its specific communicative functions are basically the same, such as historic, geographical or cultural description, exemplification or explanation. It usually does not contain any quotation or direct speech and its register can vary from being highly technical to colloquial. Metadiscourse, however, may differ from one language to the other, since the interpersonal function responds to different cultural patterns and filters. In the field of tourism (Suau, 2006) the Spanish metadiscourse, for instance, usually displays abundant qualifying adjectives and adverbs of a positive tone, where English metadiscourse contains very little of these elements, but abounds in hedges, references to the tenor in the form of personal pronouns and self-mention.

Examples:

"If **you** have limited time **we recommend you** follow this list or take our **recommended** itinerary to visit London. Some of the information here **you'll probably** know, but **it's worth reading it** all at your leisure."

www.londontourist.org

"¿Qué hacer en Castellón? Llegar por una **emocionante** ruta al Santuario de la Balma en Zorita. Ir a la vecina población de Castellfort, desde donde se contempla una **magnífica** panorámica de la zona. Conocer la **serena** belleza de los parques naturales del Prat de Cabanes"

www.comunitatvalenciana.com

Method

Hyland & Tse (2004) suggest that metadiscourse is a functional category within discourse that is important to be taken into account. Through metadiscourse an author can transform a hard and difficult text into friendly prose of a much nicer reading, and at the same time s/he establishes an important link with the reader. These two authors propose a framework of analysis for academic metadiscourse which can serve as a basis for analysing other specific languages. We are particularly interested in what they propose as Interactional Framework, involving the reader in the argument. This is the method we have followed in the current research. However, this framework is the result

of research carried out over English texts and, as far as we know, has also been applied to academic English Texts. Our purpose now is to apply it to both English and Spanish texts of tourism. Therefore, this framework will serve us as a basis but will surely provide new metadiscursive elements since it is the product of a very typified and specific genre, the promotion of touristic products and services, as well as of a different cultural filter, that of Spanish.

Framework for analysis: Hyland & Tse (2004).

Interactional Metadiscourse: involving the reader in the argument.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Hedges	withhold writer's full commitment to proposition	might/perhaps/about
Boosters	emphasize force or writer's certainty in proposition	in fact/definitely/it is clear that
Attitude markers	express writer's attitude to proposition	unfortunately/I agree/surprisingly
Engagement markers	explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader	consider/note that/you can see that
Self-mentions	explicit reference to author	I/we/my/our

Our corpus is made of around 12000 words of both Spanish and English texts of the mentioned touristic genre.

Our research questions are:

1. Is the framework for metadiscourse analysis provided by Hyland & Tse (2004) valid to be applied to the genre "Promotion of Touristic Services and Products"?
2. Are both types of metadiscourse, English and Spanish different in this genre and, if so, does this difference need to be taught at higher education?

Analysis and results

Table 1: Metadiscourse in English texts of tourism

<i>Total words</i>	<i>Hedges</i>	<i>Boosters</i>	<i>Attitude markers</i>	<i>Engagement markers</i>	<i>Self-mention</i>
5870	29	41	10	143	59
	0'50%	0'70%	0'17%	2'46%	1'01%

Remark: all the categories of Hyland & Tse's framework have been found.

Examples:

Hedges

“Or you *can* take a boat out to Greenwich”
“*It’d be* a crime to visit London and not take in a show”
“The atmosphere on the late tubes *can be* a bit rowdy, but it’s never dangerous”.
“This *can cause* amusement when somebody asks you if they can borrow your rubber..”
“At any moment trouble *can brew up* in the Atlantic and lead to cold weather”.
“Alcohol *can be bought* off licence”
“Dinner is usually at about 20:00 – though it *may be* much later”.

Boosters

“London is still a huge *bewildering* place if it’s your first visit”.
“Regent’s has *excellent* cultivated gardens”
“The view from the bridge in St James Park towards Whitehall is *stunning*”.
“What’s *amazing* is the consistent high quality of all the works displayed”.
“At other times the debates can be *soporific*”.
“It has the *most beautiful* youth hostel in the country”.
“The post and telephone services in the UK are *superb*”.

Attitude Markers

“Many visitors waste large amounts of money *simply* because..”
“Some of the information here you’ll *probably* already know”
“You’ll *probably* want to visit both, the Tower of London and Hampton Court”.
“These are moveable feasts – *especially* the spring holiday”.

Engagement Markers

“If it’s *your* first visit”.
“We *recommend you* to follow this list”.
“*You*’ll get to see such treasures as King Charles I”.
“*You* can bathe naked on Hampstead Heath”.
“For money withdrawals *you* will need to produce *your* passport”.
“*You* can buy a ticket to attractions like the Tower,..”
“*Don’t miss* the Museo de Bellas Artes”.
“*Head* for the Playa de la Malvarrosa”.

Self-mention

“This is walk two in *our* itinerary page”.
“*Our* colonial past has made the city more cosmopolitan”.
“*We* are proud of our national football”.
“*We* don’t clearly have defined seasons like in central Europe”.
“*We*’ve included the websites of all the attractions here”.
“*We*’ve got details of all London sights and attractions”.

Table 2: Metadiscourse in Spanish texts of tourism

<i>Total words</i>	<i>Hedges</i>	<i>Boosters</i>	<i>Attitude markers</i>	<i>Engagement markers</i>	<i>Self-mention</i>
5865	14	84	3	2	2
	0'24%	1'41%	0'03%	0'02%	0'02%

Remark: categories are represented in a very different way to those of the English texts. The number of boosters is here very high and it has to be mentioned that attitude markers, engagement markers and self-mention elements are very low.

Examples:

Hedges
<p>“Valencia <i>puede ser</i> una ciudad de tópicos”.</p> <p>“Son claves para <i>tratar de explicar</i> lo que no se puede explicar con palabras”.</p> <p>“<i>Aconsejamos</i> al amigo lector que seleccione si opta por visitar todo un barrio, o..”.</p> <p>“Todo esto <i>se puede complementar</i> con la visita a la Ciudad de las Ciencias”.</p> <p>“Y no deje de <i>tener en cuenta</i> la Lonja de la Seda”.</p>

Boosters
<p>“Valencia ha experimentado una <i>significativa</i> transformación en los últimos años”.</p> <p>“El nuevo Palacio de Congresos....representativa de la arquitectura más <i>vanguardista</i>..”.</p> <p>“Llegar por una <i>emocionante</i> ruta al Santuario de la Balma en Zorita..”.</p> <p>“Conocer la <i>serena</i> belleza de los parques naturales del Prat de Cabanes..”.</p> <p>“..en el <i>magnífico</i> entorno natural del balneario de Montanejos”.</p> <p>“...las <i>espectaculares</i> huellas de los dinosaurios de Alpunte”.</p> <p>“..con unas <i>espléndidas</i> vistas del Rincón de Ademuz”.</p> <p>“...acercarse a la <i>imponente</i> Cartuja de Porta Coeli”.</p> <p>“Degustar una <i>excelente</i> paella en los restaurantes del paseo marítimo”.</p>

Attitude markers
<p>“Se caracteriza por un clima suave, <i>típicamente</i> mediterráneo”.</p> <p>“..claves para tratar de explicar lo que, <i>en realidad</i>, no se puede contar con palabras”.</p> <p>“..están transformando <i>definitivamente</i> el perfil urbano”.</p>

Engagement markers
<p>“..no <i>deje</i> de tener en cuenta la Lonja de la Seda”.</p> <p>“..al amigo lector que <i>seleccione</i>”.</p>

Self-mention
<p>“<i>Aconsejamos</i> al amigo lector que seleccione”..</p> <p>“<i>Vamos a sugerirles</i> unos cuantos de los museos y monumentos..”.</p>

Discussion and conclusion

Metadiscourse as a tool for linguistic analysis has proved to have well defined and powerful elements as well as others of a weaker nature. These elements have basically been studied in academic and scientific discourse in English (Hyland, 1998; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Suau, 2005, 2005), where *hedges* have shown by and large to be

the most frequent and relevant ones. They are displayed through conditionals, modals and epistemic verbs and also a key aspect of scientific prose, where the convention of non-imposition is crucial for the scientific community to accept academic articles reporting new findings or theories. Also, Hyland & Tse (2004) propose *boosters* in their framework, as a means to confirm the certainty of a statement through adverbs or frozen expressions.

However, we think that qualifying adjectives of a positive or superlative tone, very frequent in the Spanish metadiscourse of tourism are also used in order to emphasize or modulate the propositional content of a statement and would, therefore, assist in the task of hooking the reader and establishing a link between author and reader. *Attitude markers* have, in our opinion, a similar function to that of *boosters*, with adverbs and frozen expressions such as ***in fact, really, absolutely, without doubt***. *Engagement markers* do not admit any doubt and are radically different in number in English and Spanish. These direct references to the reader are typical of the English metadiscourse and very rare in the Spanish. Finally, the self-mention or pronominalization in the first person singular or plural is also very frequent in English and rare in Spanish.

In order to answer both research questions we should say that, first, this metadiscourse framework by Hyland & Tse has proved useful to analyze the genre "Promotion of Touristic Services and Products" as a launching platform. However, several differences have been observed is compared with scientific and academic discourse. These differences can make us conclude that, possibly, a different kind of metadiscourse framework would be necessary for touristic genres. Secondly, it has proved more useful to analyze English metadiscourse than Spanish, where it has needed to be adapted and new elements have been found which would shape a different framework for Spanish texts. The results that match this second research question could lead us to think tentatively that each cultural filter establishes linguistic constraints that influence genre writing, as has been demonstrated when comparing English and Spanish metadiscourse.

From all the previous data we could probably conclude that these differences have important implications for teaching specific languages and, in particular, for teaching genre writing to higher education students of tourism both in English and Spanish. Very possibly, as has been suggested in Suau (2006a), differences in metadiscourse from one language to another must be taken into account when, for example, translating this kind of touristic genres. Otherwise, readers may not feel at ease when reading a touristic leaflet that does not reproduce metadiscourse as their cultural filter prescribes. To sum up, these differences in metadiscourse are surely important when making text books or when teaching genre writing seminars or specialized language courses in higher education.

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